The United States Reference Manual

The New York Postmaster's Provisional

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

On July 15, 1845, the first Postmasters' Provisionals were issued in New York City. On the 150th anniversary of this event, Mekeel's is pleased to present a summary of the philatelic research pertaining to this issue.

As noted in Part One of this study, we are indebted to all of the individuals and organizations upon whose research we have drawn, and extend special thanks to the staff of the American Philatelic Research Library for assisting in our research.

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Part Two: The Initials

One of the distinctive features of the New York Postmaster Provisionals is the manner in which they were marked to prevent re-use in the mails.

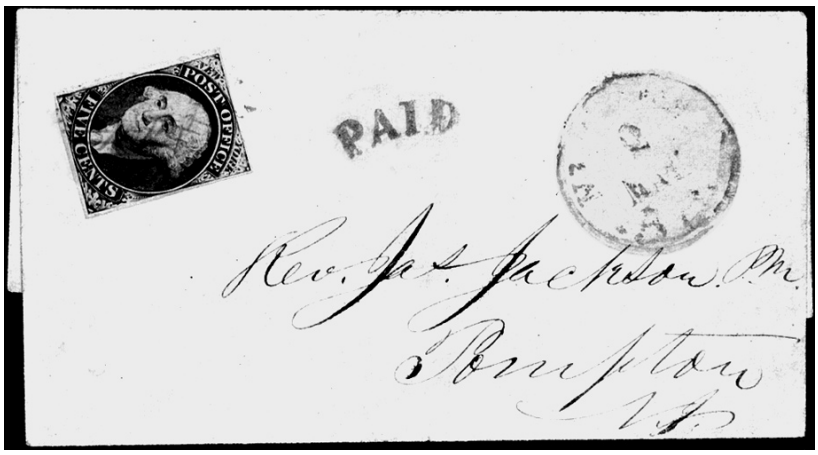
Writing in Mekeel's (U.S. Notes and Comments, September 29, 1950), Philip H. Ward, Jr. states: "…From the dates of use we can see that the earlier sheets were sold for the first two or three days without initials. The postmaster, himself, then started this initialing with his own 'R.H.M.'

"Postmaster Morris and his assistant A.C. Monson, must have been most careful with the distribution and use of these stamps for they not only initialed the stamps 'R.H.M.' or 'ACM' but they canceled and signed their stamps exceedingly well."

There are any number of studies of the various forms the initials took. Figures 1-6 above were taken from the catalog for the Ivy, Shreve & Mader 1992 auction of the Jeremiah Farrington N.Y. Postmaster Provisionals Collection.

We have matched up these illustrations with one of the better descriptive texts we have found. It was written by Sir N.E. Waterhouse for the London Philatelist, February 1921, and follows.

"…The large majority of specimens are endorsed with the initials A.C.M. in red manuscript. These are the initials of Alonzo Castle Monson, brother-in-law and assistant, to Postmaster Morris, who instructed him to initial each stamp on the sheet before they were sold as a further safeguard against counterfeiting.



"Postmaster Morris himself signed some of the stamps with his own initials, R.H.M. (Fig. 1) He however apparently soon tired of the work and handed it on to his assistant, who in turn coerced his brother, Marciana Monson, and probably some of the other clerks at the New York post office, into the tedious job.

"Besides the few copies bearing the initials R.H.M., which are of great rarity, there appear to be at least four distinctive varieties of the initials A.C.M. They may conveniently be described as follows: With the letters all joined. This type may perhaps be further sub-divided into two classes: having a pronounced loop between the C & M (Fig. 2) and with little, if any, loop and usually the top strokes of the M sharp and pointed instead of somewhat curved (3); with the A and C joined, but the M separated (4); with all three letters separated (not shown); and all letters separated and a dot between each letter (5).

"Figure 1 is the initialing of Postmaster Robert H. Morris; 2, 3 and 4 are attributed to Alonzo Castle Monson; 5 is the work of Marcena Monson, Jr.. *(Editor's Note: Figure 6 is MMJr, another form of initialing by Marciana Monson.)*

"…As to cancellations, most copies that I have seen either with or without initials are obliterated by pen usually in dark blue, but sometimes in red or black inks. Those cancelled by the red "circular," "grid" and "Paid" hand-stamps are considerably scarcer. I have not yet seen a specimen hand-stamped in black."

By far the scarcest of all the forms is "MM Jr.", of which only four used copies are known. While the initial is not discernible in the photo shown here, this is the only full cover with "MM Jr." initialing on the stamp. (It sold for $28,600 in the Christie's/Weill auction.)

Next scarcest is the rare "R.H.M." initialing. According to Paul MacGuffin (The American Philatelist, May 1936), "It is believed that the Postmaster only initialed two sheets, one of which is initialed 'R.H.M.' from top to bottom of stamp in a slightly diagonal line. On the other sheet, the direction of the endorsement is reversed and read from bottom to top."

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